

READING THE CREATION NARRATIVE IN GENESIS 1-2:4a AGAINST ITS ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN BACKGROUND

by

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Declaration

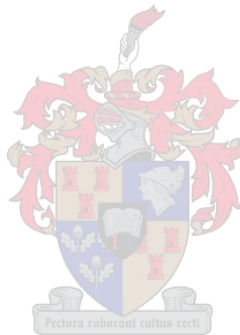
I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree.

A. Dyssel

Signature

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Abstract

Reading the creation narratives in Genesis 1 and 2, one encounters two totally different renditions. The two creation narratives agree that God created the universe and that God blesses his creation in abundance. But why did the Hebrews need two creation stories so different in style? Gen. 1-2:4a seized my interest and I wanted to explore not only the milieu in which it was written, but also to read it against the creation narratives of the ancient Near East. The research was done religious-historically.

An insight had to be gained in the function and role of mythology within a cultural system and after distinguishing between folk sagas, legends and myths, different types of myths, as well as some perspectives on myths had to be investigated. Creation themes such as creation by birth, by struggle or victory, by action or activity as well as creation through the spoken word were encountered in the various creation narratives studied. Ancient Near East cosmogonies such as the variety of Egyptian cosmogonies, as well as Mesopotamian creation epics have been considered. Hittite myths were also considered, but here the result was the discovery of an extended pantheon with virtually no creation references. Thereafter I have concentrated on the cosmogony of the Hebrew Bible and the position, structure and understanding of Gen. 1-2:4a. Most creation stories revert to bloody violence between the gods. The God of the Hebrews is a God of order – from chaos he creates more than order, he creates beauty. The subsequent survey of the conception of humankind in the near Ancient East, proved to be varied as well as interesting, some with remarkable parallels.

My interest was extended to placing the creation narrative of Gen. 1-2:4a in the modern era, by attempting to gain insight into the “Big Bang” theory, as well as Creationism and Evolution movements. Many motives were deduced by the research, but the idea of God creating in a “Godly” manner (bārā') and not merely give order to pre-created creations through struggle was unique. Human beings were created as the pinnacle of creation, and made to live in a relationship with their Creator.

Opsomming

Wanneer die skeppingsverhale in Genesis 1 en 2 gelees word, kom 'n mens in aanraking met twee totaal verskillende weergawes daarvan. Die twee skeppingsverhale stem egter ooreen dat God die heelal geskape het en dat God sy skepping ryklik geseën het. Die vraag ontstaan egter waarom die Israeliete twee verskillende skeppingsverhale in verskillende style aangebied het? Gen. 1-2:4a het my geïnteresseer en ek wou nie net alleen die milieu waarin dit geplaas was, ondersoek nie, maar die teks ook met die skeppingsverhale in die Ou Nabye Ooste saamlees. Die navorsing is religieus-histories gedoen. Insig is verkry van die funksie en rol van mitologie binne 'n kulturele sisteem en ook deur onderskeid te tref tussen volksages, legendes en mites.

Daar is ook gekyk na die verskillende soorte mites en perspektiewe daarvoor is deur navorsing verkry. Skeppingstemas soos skepping deur geboorte, deur oorwinning of stryd, deur aksie sowel as skepping deur die gesproke woord is bestudeer. Ou Nabye Oosterse kosmogonieë soos die verskeidenheid Egiptiese en Mesopotamiese skeppingsverhale is ondersoek. Mites oor die Hetiete is ook ondersoek, maar slegs 'n uitgebreide panteon is waargeneem. Daarna is op die kosmogonie van die Hebreeuse Bybel gekonsentreer. Die posisie en struktuur van Gen.1-2:4a is ondersoek. Die meeste skeppingsverhale in die Ou Nabye Ooste was as gevolg van bloedige geweld tussen gode. In teenstelling daarmee is die God van die Hebreërs 'n God van orde wat vanuit chaos skoonheid skep. Die skepping van die mens in die Ou Nabye Ooste was uiteenlopend sowel as interessant, sommige met merkwaardige ooreenkomste.

My belangstelling fokus verder daarop om die skeppingsverhale in Gen.1-2:4a in die moderne era te ondersoek, deur insig te probeer kry in die Oerknal teorie sowel as die Kreasionistiese en Evolusionêre bewegings. Gedurende die navorsing is baie motiewe afgelei, maar die idee dat God op 'n "Goddelike" manier (bārā') geskep het en nie net orde gegee het aan voorafgaande skeppings deur middel van stryd nie, is uniek. Die mens is geskape as die toppunt van die skepping en gemaak om in 'n verhouding met hul Skepper te leef.

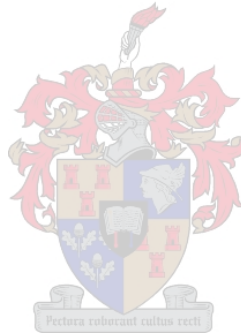
Dedication

To my wife, Irma, and our two children, Natalie and Wesley, the people who give meaning to my life.



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The Creator, God Almighty, is acknowledged for blessing me with his abundant grace through the research and completion of the thesis. I also acknowledge my wife Irma, and our two children, Natalie and Wesley for their support and understanding my passion for this thesis, and so many times forgiving my 'absence' in person and in mind. Thirdly, I acknowledge Professor Paul Kruger from the University of Stellenbosch for his enthusiasm for the subject of my research and his wise counsel. I would like to acknowledge Professor Louis Jonker for his diligent commitment as Programme Coordinator for the MPhil in Bible Interpretation, as well as his constant encouragement. Finally, I want to acknowledge my fellow student Liza Esterhuizen, for her continuous and enthusiastic support.



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Chapter One

Introduction

What exactly is creation? Does one only accept *creatio ex nihilo* as 'true' creation or does one also allow for creation from something. Is creation the beginning of history, or is it merely a primeval event? Does creation allow for interaction with the creator after the initial act of creation? Or might this interference be seen as an admission that the original act of creation was not perfect enough?

Genesis 1-2:4a in the Hebrew Bible is generally accepted to have been derived from the Priestly source, which was a postexilic (late sixth to early fifth century BCE) narrative (Knight 1985:732-733). The author(s) have been exposed to the Ancient Near East cosmogonies, predominantly the Mesopotamian and Egyptian mythologies, which could have influenced in nature, the content and style of the Genesis narrative. The question one has to ask is in which way could the creation narrative in Genesis 1-2:4a possibly have been influenced by other Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies and mythologies? Let us explore the similarities and differences and endeavour to highlight possible influences.

Please note that from here onwards Genesis 1-2:4a will be referred to only as Genesis 1 for ease of reading. This will however require the reader to bear in mind that Genesis 1 extends into Genesis 2.

Interestingly, this narrative has been inserted at the beginning of the Hebrew Bible before the older version of creation in Genesis 2:4b-25, generally accepted as having been written about the time of Solomon (latter half of the tenth century BCE) through the Yahwistic source (Knight 1985:732-733).

One needs first to investigate the importance and role of mythology within a cultural system really to understand the possible cross-religious interaction in the Ancient Near East. Only then can one establish common features in Genesis 1 and other Ancient Near East cosmogonies, and, if any, the commonalities. Von

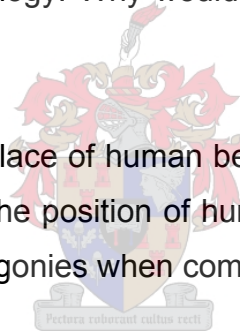
Rad's concern about possible interaction with other religions is expressed in his statement, "There has been an increasing disinclination to interpret the concepts contained in v.2 in terms of mythological conceptions of neighbouring religions" (Von Rad 1972:50). Westermann also warned that:

The ways in which people of all places and at all times are going to present the origin of humanity and the universe or of the present state of the world are not without limit; they are relatively few. And so there will be many similarities even though direct influence is excluded.

(Westermann 1984:5)

The fact is that Genesis 1 may contain unique features and ideas not common to any other cosmogony or mythology. Why would this be possible, and who would be responsible for this?

A comparative insight into the place of human beings in the relevant cosmogonies needs to be established since the position of human beings seems to be different in the Ancient Near East cosmogonies when compared to Genesis 1.



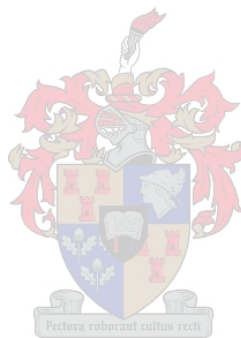
The reality is that for the absolute majority of people in modern society the relevance of the potential influence of the Ancient Near East cosmogonies on Genesis 1 have no or little significance. What relevance does the creation narrative have in modern society? One has to extend one's thoughts to integrate the scientific "Big Bang" theory into the creation narrative in Genesis 1.

Finally, with the exhaustive Creationist movements, especially in the United States of America, all contributing to the creation debate, one has to take cognisance thereof as well if one wants to test the relevance of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 in modern society. Strahler outlines the debate:

...over the past two centuries or so, the creationistic view has cohabitated with the naturalistic view on the understanding that the

former is a religious belief, whereas the latter is not based on religious belief.

(Strahler 1999:1)



Chapter Two

The Function and Role of Mythology within a Cultural System

Before we focus on myths, it is important to briefly distinguish between myths, legends and folk saga. The three genres are essential in all cultures as they deal with the ancient past when the gods created their worlds and with conquering nations recreating their worlds, with patriarchs like Abraham that created nations and with the human heroes in all the legends of each respective nation.

Herewith a brief examination of the main differences:

- 2.1 Folk Sagas:** are mostly involved with the sources of nations, starting just after creation with the first patriarchs dealing with a series of cataclysms. From these beginnings legends develop (Van Dyk 1987:55).
- 2.2 Legends:** are usually stories about heroes who overcome obstacles, struggle with dragons, killing them, and exterminate offensive armies to protect their countries (Rosman & Rubel 1981:209).
- 2.3 Myths:** Reading the Ancient Near East literature, one stands in awe of the fantasy and imagination of their myths. They created gods as individualistic and enigmatic as mythical gods can be.

Gunkel regards myths as: "...stories about gods. They are to be distinguished from sagas where the active persons are human." (Gunkel 1917:xiv). But Childs (1962:14) states clearly that when every appearance of the supernatural is classified as myth, it eradicates the real distinctions between the saga, the legend, and the myth, all of which reveal supernatural events.

Frankfort and Frankfort (1946:7) concur with Childs when they state that myths "... are products of imagination, but they are not mere fantasy. It is essential that true myth be distinguished from legend, saga, fable, and fairy tale". They admit that all these genres may even contain elements of the

myth, but it also happens that flamboyant and facetious imaginations may restructure myths into unadorned stories. They continue, "... true myth presents its images and its imaginary actors, not with the playfulness of fantasy, but with a compelling authority. It perpetuates the revelation of a 'Thou'." Eliade sees myths as follows:

The myth relates a sacred history, that is, a primordial event that took place at the beginning of time, *ab initio*...hence it is always the recital of a creation; it tells how something was accomplished, began to *be*. It is for this reason that myth is bound up with ontology; it speaks only of *realities*, of what *really* happened, of what was fully manifested.

(Eliade 1959:95)

In order to clearly understand myth, one has to gain insight into the interpretations of myths, the character of myths, different types of myths and consider general opinions on myths.

2.3.1 Interpretation of Myths

Rosman and Rubel (1981:205-209) highlight a few approaches to the interpretation of myths.

2.3.1.1 Myths as literal history: This approach analyses catastrophes in myths based on actual natural disasters that occurred. Myths about great floods that swamped the earth are linked to real floods that took place.

2.3.1.2 Myths interpreted by the Freudian approach: Myths are seen as a cultural expression of repressed anxieties and disturbances in a society.

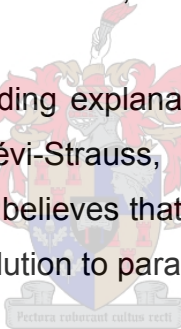
2.3.1.3 Myths in relation to their social and cultural context: The main proponent of myth as charter was conceived by Malinowski, an anti-evolutionist and anti-Freudian. The viewpoint is that myth is a charter for how and what people

should believe in, how they should operate and how they should experience things (Malinowski 1992:139).

2.3.1.4 Myths reinforcing the integration of society: Radcliffe-Brown, as cited in Rosman and Rubel (1981:206), had a different perspective from Malinowski in that he concentrated on the manner in which the myths were told; highlighting the thought processes, attitudes and emotions of the cultural grouping.

2.3.1.5 Myths and their interdependence on ritual: Kluckhohn, according to Rosman and Rubel (1981:206), believes that myths provide testimony to the derivation of rituals as well as indications of how rituals need to be performed. Myths and rituals fulfil the same cultural needs as similar feelings of expression are felt, whether myths are told or rituals performed.

2.3.1.6 Myths providing explanations for unsolved contradictions in cultures: Lévi-Strauss, as cited in Rosman and Rubel (1981:206), believes that all myths fall short of presenting an enduring solution to paradoxes.



Rosman and Rubel (1981:207) conclude that all the theoretical approaches to myths, as briefly discussed above, are complementary to one another, although each views myths from a different perspective. The only viewpoint entirely discredited, is that of interpreting myths as a literal history. It is therefore clear that myths have to be understood within a specific cultural milieu and that interpretation needs to be sensitive to the complexities of the particular culture.

2.3.2 The Nature of Ancient Near Eastern Myths

Frankfort and Frankfort summarise the character of myth in the following words:

Myth is a form of poetry which transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth; a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behaviour, which does not find its fulfilment in the act, but must proclaim and elaborate a poetic form of truth.

(Frankfort & Frankfort 1946:8)

Therefore, as myths reveal “absolute” truths to their believers, they become overwhelmingly authoritative and do not need to be vindicated before anyone.

Myths helped people to understand the acts of natural phenomena. The Babylonians for example would believe in this scenario that the Bull of Heaven’s hot breath dried out the earth and that the bird Imdugud covered the skies with the dark storm clouds of its enormous wings (Frankfort & Frankfort 1946:6).

Myths were dramatised as in Babylonia where the New Year festival celebrated the day when the world was created: when Marduk conquered chaos. The Enuma Elish was recited at this festival (Frankfort & Frankfort 1946:7). They also conclude that Holy Communion is a well known modern example of the dramatisation of myths. The continued celebration of Holy Communion by Christians, especially by Roman Catholics, as sharing the real blood and body of Christ therefore seems to reveal modern society’s continuation of myths.

Myths greatly assisted people in the quest to understand creation, and most creation stories are derived from births known to humankind: by either a goddess as in Greek mythology, a demon as

in Babylonia, or men as in the Egyptian mythology for example where Atum rose from the primeval waters (Frankfort & Frankfort 1946:9).

2.4 Different Types of Myths

A typological analysis of myth has resulted in defining nine different kinds of myths. We briefly look at this analysis by Heiler (1961:283-286).

- 2.4.1 Theogonic myths: These are narratives pertaining to the origins of the gods.
- 2.4.2 Cosmogonic myths (Creation myths): These concern the creation of the world, the ordering of the cosmos and the repression and restraint of chaos.
- 2.4.3 Cosmological myths: These explain the divine ordering of nature firmly secured in the primordial beginnings. Solar, seasonal and astral myths are included under this category.
- 2.4.4 Anthropological myths: These are the narration of the creation of human beings and their relationship with the gods.
- 2.4.5 Ancestral myths (*Stammvatermythen*): These are very close to the saga, as they depict the origins of peoples and tribes.
- 2.4.6 Cult myths: These deal with cult ceremonies and the primeval origins of sanctuaries, although this could also be closely related to the saga.
- 2.4.7 Soteriological revelation myths: These myths portray divine intervention in the human world by means of a saviour and may be very closely related to eschatological myths discussed under 2.4.9 below.
- 2.4.8 Myths about the next life (*Jenseitsmythen*): These include narratives about the underworld as well as eternal life, heaven and human relationship with death. This may be seen as the logical extension to anthropological myths.
- 2.4.9 Eschatological myths (*Endzeitmythen*): These include end-of time events which lead to the re-establishment of the primal situation.

2.5 Perspectives on Myth

George (as quoted by Rogerson 1974:25-26) recognises the poetic character of myth and holds that saga has a more prosaic character. Whilst saga ceases as soon as written records of events are created, and therefore merely becomes history, myths are enveloping. George believes that the opening chapters of Genesis are myths, whilst the saga is presented in the stories about the patriarchs. He embraces the idea that saga gives insights into the historical development of peoples, whilst myth expresses its outlook and sympathies.

Another interesting opinion about myths is held by Ewald (1864:63-64). He states that myths are stories about gods (*Göttersagen*) and are therefore absent in the Old Testament. He goes on to extend the definition of saga to obscure some other thoughts on myths. He believed that narrative had come down to us through oral tradition by *Überkommniss*, whilst saga was primarily dependent on memory (*Gedächtnis*), thus ensuring the conveyance of the fundamental facts of an event or an episode, it was indeed possible to forget or to sometimes inadvertently twist inferred details. Here Ewald merely excludes the possible presence of myth by means of a narrow definition.

He prefers to make a distinction between *Gottessagen* (stories about God) and *Göttersagen* (stories about gods). This definition of myth made it clear that there is no place for myth in the Old Testament.

2.6 Concluding Thoughts on Myths

What exactly is a myth? Does it oppose reality and truth?

The myth defines itself by its own mode of being. It can only be grasped, as a myth, in so far as it *reveals* something as having been *fully manifested*, and this manifestation is at the same time *creative* and *exemplary*, since it is the foundation of a structure of reality as well as of a kind of human behaviour. A myth always

narrates something as having *really happened*, as an event that took place, in the plain sense of the term – whether it deals with the creation of the World, or of the most insignificant animal or vegetable species, or of an institution.

(Eliade 1960:14)

Eliade adds that myths reveal the structure of reality and that they unveil “true” stories and concern themselves with authenticity. In primitive societies myths express the “absolute” truth as they narrate a sacred history, especially the revelation of the holy time of the beginning (Eliade 1960:23). But when myth is no longer believed to be a revelation of the mystery it holds, the myth becomes dishonest and unobserved and is relegated into a tale or a legend.

Eliade (1960:24) concludes by asking what has become of myths in the modern world, and if they have dissipated what has today taken the indispensable place occupied by the myth in traditional societies?

Delitzsch (as quoted by Rogerson 1974:48) reacts to the Mesopotamian myths and epics that were published during the last three decades of the nineteenth century, and has made the statement that most of the religious doctrines of Israel, including monotheism, were of Babylonian origin, and therefore it becomes inevitable for scholars to make comparisons.

Many believe that Genesis 1-11 can be deemed as myth. This is however a very contentious issue. Can Genesis, or for that matter, many parts of the Old Testament be labelled myth?

Myths are nothing but the truth for those who have grown up in that socio-cultural milieu. Myth was truth for the ancient Greeks, but for a Greek called Luke, the author of a Christian gospel, it obviously became a fantasy, a myth, a lie.

Chapter Three

Types of Creation

Westermann (1984:26-47) outlines four types of creation in the world outside Israel.

3.1 Creation by Birth, or by a Succession of Births

Although the Egyptian and Mesopotamian cosmogonies are very different from each other, they agree in a notable way when they describe the origin of the world as a succession of births. This is also the case in a considerable part of Sumerian myths of origin, resulting in a series of births as quoted from Westermann in the myth “Cattle and Grain” which describes the birth of the gods: “When An had begotten the Anuma gods in the mountains of heaven and earth...” (Falkenstein as quoted by Westermann 1984:27).

Here the origins of cattle breeding and plant vegetation are closely linked to the birth of the gods in the background of the world and its beginnings. The myth of “Enki and Ninhursag” illustrates crop growing derived from the birth of the gods (Westermann 1984:27). There is a difference when these are compared to Babylonian creation myths. There is no further description of the origins, except that a god may have created a series of other gods. The Enuma Elish begins with a genealogy of the gods. Westermann (1984:26) puts it very well with his observation that creation here is not an act of creation but a succession of births, where creation is only the consequence of the drama of the beginning.

In Egypt, creation as a succession of births is also very prevalent. We can look at the origin of both the Ennead in Heliopolis as well as the Ogdoad in Hermopolis to support this fact. In the Ennead Atum masturbated and the semen was swallowed, where after he sneezed and Shu as well as Tefnut were born out of this sneeze. From Shu and Tefnut were created their

children, the earth-god Geb and the sky-goddess Nut. Out of Geb and Nut two couples were born, namely Osiris and Isis as well as Seth and Nephthys. In Hermopolis, four couples embodied the chaos prior to creation, namely Nun and Nuanet (The Waters), Huh and Haunet (Infinite Flood), Kuk and Kauket (Darkness) and Amun and Amaunet (Chaos). An egg came forth from the activities of these four couples, containing the god Atum who subsequently created everything.

In Memphis creation takes place through the divine word instead of genealogy as seen above.

3.2 Creation as the Consequence of Battle or Victory

The Enuma Elish fits this type of creation perfectly. We note two types of struggles here. First, in Tablet 1, the young gods agitate the older gods, with the end result of the victory of Ea over Apsu, and second, the struggle of Marduk with Tiamat leads to the creation of the heavens and earth. Even the creation of humankind bears testimony to violence where Qingu is killed in order to assist passively with the creation process. He is sacrificed in this way to create humans for service to the gods. This process of struggle in creation is excluded from Genesis 1, although one may sense a subdued resonance of conflict in Gen. 1:2. But I concur with Westermann when he states that "...for the most part it is quite clear that the victory over the monster of chaos has nothing to do with creation" (Westermann 1984: 33).

3.3 Creation by Action or Activity

Creation by separation or division, and the creation of people created from clay, are the most prevalent creation acts in the Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies. In the Enuma Elish it is the core of its creation narrative, and it is also used in the Sumerian myth of "Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Underworld" with the words:

After heaven had been moved away from earth,
After the earth had been separated from heaven,

After the name of man had been fixed;

After An had carried of heaven,

After Enlil had carried of the earth...

(Kramer 1961:37)

We also find creation by separation in descriptions in Egyptian myths. In Heliopolis, Shu, the goddess of the air, separates Geb, the god of the earth, from the goddess of the heaven, Nut.

In the formation of human beings, the rendition that this occurred through mud or clay is widespread in creation myths. In Egyptian myths, the creation of humankind was not an important act. The focus was more on the creation of gods, and divine kings. However we note one creation act of humans by Khnum, the potter god of Elephantine.

Thou art the master of the wheel,
who is pleased to model on the wheel...

Thou art the All-Mighty...

And thou hast made men on the wheel...

Thou hast formed *every thing* on thy wheel...

(Brandon 1963:61)

The formation of people from clay is also very prevalent in Mesopotamia. Sumerian myths talk about "After Anu, Enlil, Enki and Ninhursag had fashioned the blackheaded (people)..." (Brandon 1963:87) and "Ninmah, the goddess of birth and motherhood, she is to form a person from the clay of primeval Chaos...humanity is made from earth..." (Kramer as quoted in Westermann 1984: 36).

Westermann (1984:35-37) continues to draw attention to two characteristics of the creation account of human beings in Genesis 1 as being part of a long prehistory. Firstly, one may note the creation of humans as the outcome of a specific decision. Enki, in the Sumerian myth, is “awakened” and implores his mother to create a person, and Marduk, in the Enuma Elish, reacts in the same manner “... When Marduk hears the words of the gods, his heart prompts (him) to fashion artful works...”. The second characteristic is the creation of human beings in the image of God. This trait was seen as a “higher” level of creation, only attested to in Genesis 1. This characteristic is so widespread in other cultures that one cannot ascribe it only to Genesis.

In Egypt, the Elephantine god, Khnum, makes a person according to a model. Meri-Ka-Re gives the following rendition of the creation of humankind in the image of the king: “He has created the air so that their noses can live. They are images of him, they have come forth from his body...” (Otto as quoted in Westermann 1984:35).

In the Mesopotamian tradition we find this in the creation of humankind in the Enuma Elish at the end, and also in the Gilgamesh Epic, where Aruru was described as doing the following:

When Aruru heard this,
a double of Anu she conceived within her.
Aruru washed her hands,
Pinched off clay and cast it on the steppe.
(On the steppe) she created valiant Enkidu...

(Westermann 1984:37)

We also find the creation of humankind in the image of the god(s) in the Sumerian myth “Enki and Ninmah”. “Oh my mother, the being whom you

named is there: Associate the image (?) of the gods with him....” (Kramer as quoted in Schmökel 1975: 77).

3.4 Creation Through the Spoken Word

This act of creation holds vital importance in Genesis 1. Many theologians hold that this creation action is unique to God only, but one is confronted by the creation by word by the god Ptah:

And great and important is Ptah,
who gave life to all the [gods] and their ka's
as well through this heart and this tongue,
as which Horus and Thoth
have both evolved by means of Ptah.

(Allen 1997a:22)

The story is then told that Ptah is preeminent in every being; the gods, people, animals, insects and is planning and controlling everything he desires. His mouth pronounces and the identity of everything is given. A few verses later Ptah's creation by word is reiterated:

The eyes' seeing, the ears' hearing, the nose's breathing of air
send up (information) to the heart,
and the latter is what causes every conclusion to emerge;
it is the tongue that repeats what the heart plans.

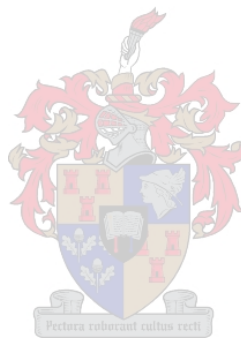
(Allen 1997a:22)

A further discussion point may also be the fact that Ptah also rested after his creation:

So has Ptah come to rest after his making everything and every
divine speech as well, having given birth to the gods, having

made their towns, having founded their nomes, having set the gods in their cult-places, having made sure their bread-offerings, having founded their shrines, having modelled their bodies to what contents them. So have the gods entered their bodies - of every kind of wood, every kind of mineral, every kind of fruit, everything that grows all over him, in which they have evolved.

(Allen 1997a:23)



Chapter 4

Egyptian Cosmogonies

The Egyptian mythology left us no complete and continuous story of creation. It is rich in different cosmogonies, and sadly all that remained were fragments with many diversions and creator gods. Therefore the cosmogonies discussed do not represent the complete Egyptian notion of creation. Throughout the Egyptian cosmogonies one struggles to find much about the creation of humankind. One version tells of the sun-god Re, from the cosmogony of Heliopolis, lamenting on seeing the earth so barren and without life, that he cried and his tears (*rimi*) fell to earth and became men (*rome*). Khnum, the potter god of Elephantine, used clay to create people and animals on his potter's wheel, and used his breath to bring them to life (Redford 1992:396-399).

There are more creation stories from Egypt, as listed below, but one should also take note of King Merikare's father (twenty-first century BCE), who referred to creation simply by stating that humankind is god's flock. He made the heavens and the earth by defeating the water monster, and he created life by breathing into their nostrils. He further alludes to the fact that people are made in his image, coming forth from his body (Redford 1992:396-399).

4.1 Cosmogony of Heliopolis

Leeming (2004:68) refers to the Pyramid Texts that originated in Heliopolis about 2350BCE, and refers to this cosmogony as the most orthodox. The nine gods of Heliopolis are known as the Ennead. It is important to note that it also starts, as with all of the Egyptian creation stories, with the hypotheses of the primeval waters. In Heliopolis it is referred to as Nun. The formless chaos of pre-creation was contained in Nun. From these waters rose the god Atum (later also referred to as Atum-Re) as a primeval mount. At the beginning nothing existed except the god Atum (closely associated with the god Re, as various hyphenated examples of the name Atum-Re are known), and Atum creates by means of self-impregnation. Here we note the version

of creation by birth. The Ennead of nine deities was as follows in protocol: Egyptian texts refer to the god Shu and his female counterpart Tefnut as the Twins; Atum masturbated and the semen was swallowed, where after he sneezed and Shu as well as Tefnut were born out of this sneeze:

His Ennead is before him, in teeth and lips –
that seed and those hands of Atum:
(for) Atum's Ennead evol[ed] through his seed and his fingers,
but the Ennead is teeth and lips in this mouth that pronounced
the identity of everything,
and from which Shu and Tefnut emerged and gave birth to the
Ennead.

(Allen 1997a:22)

Atum thus provided the breath of life:

The eyes' seeing, the ears' hearing, the nose's breathing of air
send up (information) to the heart,
and the latter is what causes every conclusion to emerge;
it is the tongue that repeats what the heart plans...

(Allen 1997a:22)

From Shu and Tefnut were created their children, the earth-god Geb and the sky-goddess Nut. In this newly created universe, with the heavens and the earth in place, with the primeval waters surrounding it, Atum became Atum-Re. From the union of Geb and Nut, were born two couples, namely Osiris and Isis as well as Seth and Nephthys. Osiris and Isis represented the fertility of the earth and humankind, where Shu and Nephthys represented the opposite (Van Dijk 1995:1700). And Horus, who was born from Osiris and Isis, is the archetype of the reigning Pharaoh. Eventually it was Seth who brought death to the earth by murdering Osiris.

So were all the gods born,
Atum and his Ennead as well,
for it is through what the heart plans
and the tongue commands that every divine speech
has evolved...

(Allen 1997a:22)

4.2 Cosmogony of Hermopolis

In the city of Hermopolis (Khemenu) the emphasis was placed on "...a great abyss of nothingness out of which creation came..." (Leeming 2004:69). This primordial chaos consisted of four pairs of gods that made up the Hermopolitan pantheon of eight, known as the Ogdoad. The creator god was the sun god Re.

Four couples consisting of males and females embodied the chaos prior to creation in four forms, namely the Waters (Nun and Nuanet), the Infinite Flood (Huh and Haunet), Darkness (Kuk and Kauket) and Chaos (Amun and Amaunet). From these four couples, noted as active energies in the creation process, an egg came forth, bearing the god who subsequently created everything – Atum. Here we thus find creation from a cosmic egg.

4.3 Cosmogony of Memphis

The British Museum houses a slab of black granite authored by the Nubian pharaoh, Shabaqo, in the years 716 to 701 BCE. It is thought to have been adapted from an original text. Uncertainty reigns about the time of the original composition. It seems as if Shabaqo deliberately directed the text he wrote against the theology of that of Heliopolis, according to Brunner (1975:4). The Heliopolis cosmogony is adjusted and re-interpreted, and Ptah, the high god is the creator. Ptah created by thinking and calling out their names. Therefore we can say that Ptah created by uttering the spoken word.

The following text is an excerpt describing the creation according to the theology of Memphis. One should note the act of creation by word and thoughts:

And great and important is Ptah, who gave life to all the [gods] and their ka's.

as well through this heart and this tongue, as which Horus and Thoth have both evolved by means of Ptah...

It has evolved that heart and tongue have control of [all] limb[s],

show[ing] that he is preeminent in every body and in every mouth - of all the gods, all people, all animals, and all crawling things that live - planning and governing every thing he wishes...



(Allen 1997a:22)

Through Ptah all had evolved, as he gave birth to all the gods, and every good thing on earth was his idea. Then Ptah came to rest after creating everything:

So has Ptah come to rest after his making everything and every divine speech as well, having given birth to the gods, having made their towns, having founded their nomes, having set the gods in their cult-places, having made sure their bread-offerings, having founded their shrines, having modelled their bodies to what contents them...

(Allen 1997a:23)

The content reveals a different rendition of Egyptian cosmogony when compared with that of Heliopolis and Hermopolis. It contains images from these cosmogonies, but is different in many ways. The god Ptah resides in the capital city of Memphis, situated about forty kilometres from Heliopolis, the home of the sun-god Re and the creator-god Re-Atum (Wilson 1946:56).

It is interesting to note that the Memphite texts do not discard the existing creation stories of Egypt, for example that the creator-god Atum sprung forth from the primeval waters of the Nun from where he then proceeded to create his Ennead of gods. The Memphite texts merely include them all in a higher order. Wilson (1946:56) indicates that thought and speech were seen as ancient attributes of power in Egypt and that these transpired as attributes of the sun-god. Hu is “authorative utterance” – speech so powerful that it creates, and Sia “perception” the cognitive perception of ideas, subjects and situations. Normally, as indicated in the Pyramid Texts, the deceased kings were thought to have captured Hu and had control over Sia.

The Memphite texts adapt these attributes to the heart as the organ that creates thought which the tongue then transforms into the conceived thought as an astonishing reality. The god Ptah possessed these attributes as he “...is himself thought and speech in every heart and tongue, and thus was the first creative principle...” (Wilson 1946:57).

Ptah, the Great One; he is the heart and tongue of the Ennead of gods...who begot the gods...

There came into being in the heart, and there came into being on the tongue in the form of Atum...

(Wilson 1946:57)

Therefore the creator-god Atum was created out of nothing but a thought and the utterance of being.

Ptah then also passed his power to all the gods, but Ptah is also present in every body, the minds, and mouths of all gods, all people, all animals and everything that lives. Therefore the same actions that created Atum are still present and functional, as Ptah still creates wherever thought and command exist.

Wilson found difficulty in accepting the word 'rested' in "And so Ptah rested after he had made everything, as well as the divine order." He prefers the word satisfied to rested: "...and so Ptah was satisfied, after he had made everything..." (Wilson 1946:58-59). The reason being that "rested" may cross-refer to God's Sabbath, but the word "satisfied" not. He did not however comment on the possibility that "Ptah was satisfied" may also refer to "God saw that it was good" as mentioned several times in Gen. 1.

4.4 Theban Cosmogony

This cosmogony was produced by the cultic centre of Thebes, where it was Amun, the principal god, who created the world. The Thebans took the Heliopolis as well as the Memphite cosmogonies to a further conclusion, in that Amun is a transcendent god who stands outside of creation in sovereign existence, as he begot creation when nothing existed (Leeming 2004:71).

According to texts dating back to Ramses II (1279 – 1213BCE) the god Amun, later known as Amun-Re, was the creator god. Amun was known as an invisible god of unknown origins but also one without parents. Amun was even invisible to other gods and had no outer identity.

The one who crafted himself, whose appearance is unknown.
Perfect aspect, who evolved into a sacred emanation.
Who built his processional images
and created himself by himself...

(Allen 1997b:23)

All the subordinate gods were aspects of Amun. Out of Amun were created the gods of Heliopolis as well as the gods of Hermopolis. A later version has it that Amun took the form of Ptah and created the primeval egg in the primeval waters of Nun and that he then fertilized the egg wherefrom the other gods came forth.

As with the Memphite creation, there is the tendency to form a single god who can assimilate many forms of godliness and be known as the only creator god and finally the only god.

It seems that the ultimate foundation in the Theban creation myths was that of the creator itself, conceptualised in the god, Amun (Allen 1997b:23).

4.5 Elephantine Cosmogony

Khnum was the god worshipped on the island of Elephantine. Khnum created gods and human beings out of clay from his potter's wheel and gave life to them by breathing into their nostrils. We may note that that the Egyptians distinguished their gods, but not as different personages. Khnum, a god with the appearance of a ram, was also often acknowledged as Khnum-Re, after being identified with the creator-god Re (James 1960:207).

4.6 Creation Themes in Egyptian Cosmogonies

Egypt has a number of creation themes:

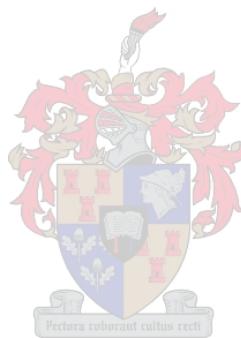
- (i) Creation by birth, as in the Heliopolis cosmogony where Atum masturbates, swallows his semen and sneezes to give birth to Shu and Tefnut.
- (ii) Creation by shaping from clay in the Elephantine cosmogony by the hands of Khnum on his potters wheel.
- (iii) Creation through speech and thought by Ptah in the Memphis cosmogony.
- (iv) Creation through a cosmic egg in Hermopolis by Thoth.

4.7 Conception of Humankind in Egyptian Cosmogonies

The creation of humankind is not very prevalent in the Egyptian cosmogonies. The sun-god Re, in the Heliopolis Cosmogony, expressed so much grief when he saw the earth so barren and without life, that he cried and the tears (*rimi*) of the sun-god fell to earth and became people (*rome*).

Another version of the creation of humankind is that Khnum, the potter god of Elephantine, created people and animals on his potter's wheel out of clay, and breathed his breath into them.

King Merikare's father observed that people are made in his image, coming forth from his body (Redford 1992:396–399).



Chapter 5

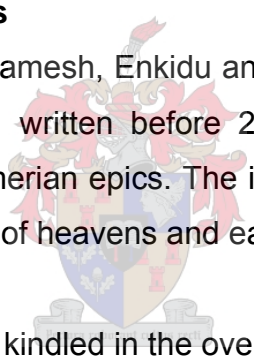
Mesopotamian Cosmogonies

Various cultures inhabited the same region and integrated the various renditions. Leeming (2004:37) points out that most of our knowledge of the Mesopotamian mythology originated from the mid-to-late-third-millennium Sumerian and Akkadian fragmented tablets.

The three cosmogonies that will be explored are the Sumerian epic of “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld”, the Akkadian creation epic of Atrachasis and the Babylonian Enuma Elish.

5.1 Sumerian Cosmogonies

The Sumerian epic, “Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Netherworld”, is a poem of approximately 300 lines, written before 2000 BCE as one of about five stories written in the Sumerian epics. The important creation acts are those of creation by separation of heavens and earth.



...when the fire was kindled in the oven of the land of Sumer,
when the heaven had been separated from the earth,
when the earth had come down from heaven,
when the seed of man was established,
when An chose heaven for himself,
when Enlil had chosen earth for himself,
when the underworld had been delivered up to Ereshkigal...

(Van Dijk as quoted in Schmökel 1975:74)

Kramer (1961:30-41) points out that the Sumerian term for the universe was *an-ki* which is a combination of An (heaven) and Ki (earth). From the maternal subterranean waters of the goddess Nammu a primordial mountain rose and Enlil was conceived by An and Ki as male and female.

As one experiences in many creation myths, heaven and earth was separated so that creation could take place in the space between them. Here An lifted the heavens and the sky and Enlil, the god of the air, created space. Then the gods and goddesses married and took responsibility for the land. Enki, son of Nammu, was lazy and did not work much. Nammu then asked him to create humans to work the fields. Enki then instructed Nammu to take mud from the swamps (apsu) and Enki shaped the clay into humans. Thereafter the humans were put to work under supervision of the goddess Ninmah-Ninhursaga.

The goddess Nammu, the embodiment of the primeval sea, was responsible for creation by birth, for the god of the sky, An, and the goddess of the earth, named Ki. An and Ki conceived many gods, but Enlil was the one who ordered the universe. Enki, the god of wisdom, lived in the fresh waters, the god Apsu. One should take cognisance of the fact that the Sumerian myths are important in that they form the basis for the later Babylonian myths like the Enuma Elish (Van Dyk 2001:38).

5.2 Akkadian Cosmogonies

The Akkadian epic of Atrachasis explains the creation of humankind to relieve the lesser gods from their manual labour and toiling. This happened through the intervention of Atrachasis (“exceeding wise”) and Ea.

When gods were man,
They did forced labor, they bore drudgery.
Great indeed was the drudgery of the gods,
The forced labor was heavy, the misery too much...

(Foster 1997b:450)

They then approached Ea who ordered Nintu to create humankind.
Aw-ilu was killed and Nintu mixed clay with his flesh and blood.
The Igigi gods spat upon the clay and Mami addressed the great gods:

You ordered me the task and I have completed (it)!
You have slaughtered the god,
along with his inspiration.
I have done away with your heavy forced labor...

(Foster 1997b:451)

5.3 Babylonian Cosmogonies

The Babylonian creation epic, the *Enuma Elish*, is based on a first-millennium BCE text tablet found in Assur, Nineveh, Kish and Uruk (Leeming 2004:51).

Ricoeur (as quoted in Rogerson 1974:140) notes that the drama of creation is typical of the myth in the *Enuma Elish*. He believes that order as opposed to chaos is not original but terminal. Chaos exists before order, and therefore evil is with the origin of the divine gods, with the explicit connotation that mankind is not the origin of evil, but that evil lies at the heart of divine beings. Therefore the present state of the world is merely the result that evil was used to combat evil. Humankind was created from the blood of one of the defeated gods of chaos.

One must take cognisance of the apparent main focus of the *Enuma Elish* in that it is not the creation of the universe and humanity, but that of the god Marduk, being elevated to the top of the pantheon of gods. But we will look at the acts of creation in the *Enuma Elish* with excerpts as cited in Foster (1997a:390–402).

In the *Enuma Elish*, there were only Apsu and Tiamat in the beginning and other gods were created through them. Apsu was later slain by the god Ea after a violent contest. In the consequent battle between Tiamat and another god, Marduk, Marduk kills Tiamat and splits her body in half. He subsequently sets up one half as the sky in which the heavenly bodies and their associated deities dwell. The bottom half of the body is used to form

the earth. The firmament is completed. Then Marduk kills one of Tiamat's conspirators, Qingu, and from his blood mankind is created.

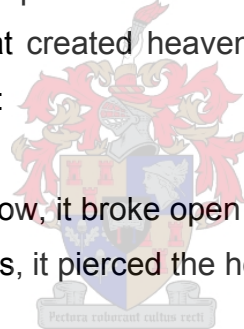
The Enuma Elish begins with the following words, announcing the gods Apsu and goddess Tiamat:

When on high no name was given to heaven,
Nor below was the netherworld called by name,
Primeval Apsu was their progenitor,
And matrix-Tiamat was she who bore them all...

(Forster 1997a:391)

From the union between Apsu and Tiamat the gods were created.
Marduk was the god that created heavens and earth by the violent battle between him and Tiamat:

He shot off the arrow, it broke open her belly,
It cut to her innards, it pierced the heart...



With his merciless mace he crushed her skull.
He cut open the arteries of her blood,...
He split her in two, like a fish for drying...

(Foster 1997a:398)

Marduk set up heaven with one half of her body, and the earth with the other. He inspected the firmament he set up and created and erected the "Great Sanctuary", in which he allowed Ea, Enlil and Anu to dwell.

He continued by establishing the stars in the likeness of the gods, and ordered time in years each consisting of twelve months. Marduk also created the moon and related its position to the sun:

He established (in) constellations the stars, their likenesses.
He marked the year, described its boundaries,
He set up twelve months of three stars each...

He made the moon appear, entrusted (to him) the night.
He assigned to him the crown jewel of nighttime
To mark the day (of the month)...

...you shall be in opposition, at the midpoint of each [month],
when the sun f[ac]es you from the horizon of heaven...

(Foster 1997a:399)

5.4 Creation Themes in Mesopotamian Cosmogonies

The Mesopotamian cosmogonies are not as prominent as those from Egypt and are more concerned about the organisation of the universe than the creation thereof. Theogony, the creation of the gods, is very prominent, as one can deduct from the Enuma Elish.

Two creation themes are in common with Egypt; creation by means of separation (Marduk's actions in the Enuma Elish) and creation as a process of birth (Enuma Elish). Original creation themes are cosmogony by means of struggle and that the creation of human beings is an important event.

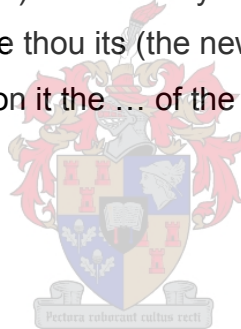
5.5 Conception of Humankind in Mesopotamian Cosmogonies

Under King Nebuchadnezzar (605–562BCE) Babylon once again dominated the Ancient Near East during an era called the Neo-Babylonian. It supported a strong revival of Babylonian religion and mythology reaching back to the Sumerians. It was the time of the Israelites' exile and captivity and the cross-pollination must have been strong, although the Israelites in

Babylonia were not forced to become absorbed into the dominant culture (Leeming 2004:22). Let us explore the possible cross-influences, if any.

The Sumerian myth “Enki and Ninmah” describes the creation of humankind in the following way:

O my mother, the creature whose name thou hast uttered,
it exists,
Bind upon it the ...of the gods;
Mix the heart of the clay that is over the abyss,
The good and princely *fashioners* will *thicken* the clay,
Thou, do thou bring the *limbs* into existence;
Ninmah (the earth-mother goddess) will work above thee,
...(goddesses of birth) will stand by thee at thy fashioning;
O my mother, decree thou its (the new-born's) fate,
Ninmah will bind upon it the ... of the gods,
...as man...



(Kramer 1961: 70)

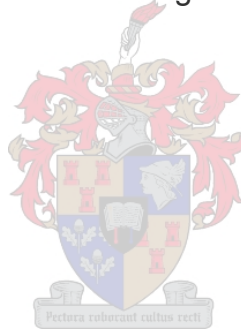
In the Enuma Elish, Marduk kills one of Tiamat's conspirators, Qingu, and from his spilled blood humans are created, mostly with blood and clay. Aruru in the Gilgamesh Epic, created the hero Enkidu by means of a pinch of clay that she took on the steppe.

Creation of humankind: Tablet VI

(1) When [Mar]duk heard the speech of the gods,
He was resolving to make artful things:
He would tell his idea to Ea,
What he thought of in his heart he proposes,
(5) "I shall compact blood, I shall cause bones to be,
I shall make stand a human being, let 'Man' be its name.
I shall create humankind,

They shall bear the gods' burden that those may rest.
I shall artfully double the ways of the gods:
(10) Let them be honored as one but divided in twain. "
Ea answered him, saying these words,
He told him a plan to let the gods rest,
"Let one, their brother, be given to me,
Let him be destroyed so that people can be fashioned....

(31) They imposed the punishment on him (Qingu – A.D.)
and shed his blood.
From his blood he made mankind,
He imposed the burden of the gods and exempted the gods.
(35) After Ea the wise had made mankind,
They imposed the burden of the gods on them!



(Foster 1997a:400-401)

Chapter Six

Hittite Myths

The Hittites were non-Semitic invaders who settled in Asia Minor about the beginning of the third millennium BCE and created an empire that lasted until 1225 BCE (Hooke 1963:95).

Hittite religious texts contain an extended number of deities. At the head of all stood the male and female sun deities, namely the Sun-god of Heaven, which was the shepherd of humankind and the king of the Lands, and the Sun-goddess of Arinna, queen of the Lands. Below them in the pantheon were Weather-gods, an extended group with various attendants, followed by a group of gods which include names of Babylonian gods such as Ea (god of the sweet waters), while one treaty also mentions the name of Marduk. The pantheon is further extended to the god Telipinu and his cult-centres, deities from the Netherworld, local deities and the list ends with rivers, mountains, heaven and earth, etc. (Gurney 1977:4-5).

Hittite myths were in the form of epic poems, with their main focus on the distribution of power amongst the myriad of gods. The gods portrayed in the Hittite myths are notably influenced by Babylonian as well as Canaanite epics, which is to be expected due to the close links of the Hittites with Babylonians, the Amorites and the Canaanites. Thousands of Hittite texts found were inscribed with Babylonian cuneiform (Kühne 1975:148).

References to the origin of the world are extremely scarce in Hittite myths. Below is an example where the gods Ea and Upelluri are in conversation, with Upelluri saying: "When heaven and earth were built upon me, I was not aware (of it). Nor was I aware of the way in which they came and separated heaven and earth with and iron blade" (Kühne 1975:152). The significance of the Hittites most probably lies in the fact that they may have been instrumental in spreading Sumero-Babylonian as well as Canaanite material into neighbouring regions (Kühne 1975:150).

Chapter Seven

Cosmogonies in Syro-Palestine

7.1 Cosmogony in Ugarit

The Kingdom of Ugarit existed around 1300 BCE, north of Canaan, on the North Syrian coast. The god Baal engaged in a battle with the god Yamm. The victorious Baal became king and now controlled the earth and the universe, and limited chaos through creative actions such as setting boundaries to the sea, which is the slain god Yamm. (Van Dyk 2001:35). Typical of the creation mythologies of Syro-Palestine is the idea of conflict.

The oldest known Syro-Palestinian pantheon is that of Ebla (about 2450–2250 CE). The principal god is Dagan (Dagon in the Bible), referred to as Judge of the Gods, who was deemed to be a major god also in western Mesopotamia. Although a number of different Syro-Palestinian deities were acknowledged and worshipped, each community chose one or two gods to be the god(s) of the nation. Van der Toorn (1995:2048) concludes that Yahweh as the national deity of the Israelites was congruent with other national deities like Baal at Ugarit, Dagan amongst the Philistines, Chemosh amongst the Moabites and Milcom of the Ammonites.

Canaanite religions were always polytheistic, whilst the supreme Canaanite deity was the god El – the creator of the earth and father of humanity. His gods (sons of El) were said to number seventy. Day (1992:832–833) presumes that El was also the creator of the universe, but that a creation account is lacking. His consort was the goddess, Athirat. There is evidence that Baal (also called Adda) was appointed king by El. Other deities also existed, for example Melqart, a leading god of the Phoenicians, as well as the chief god of Sidon, named Eshmun. The Punic deities were the god Baal-hammon and his consort, the goddess Tinnit.

Besides the chief god at Ugarit there were also lesser gods, demons, and goddesses. The most important of these lesser gods were Baal Asherah,

Yam (the god of the sea) and Mot (the god of death). What is of great interest here is that Yam is the Hebrew word for sea and Mot is the Hebrew word for death!

Van der Toorn (1995:2044–2048) holds that the Syro-Palestinian gods possessed the characteristics of human actors – with feelings, their own thought processes and with a self-will. It is important to know that their bodies resembled human bodies, though much larger, and in cases were gifted with special features such as an extra pair of eyes. The Ancient Near Eastern gods have been described as basilomorphous, having the qualities of a king and they were thought to be seated on a heavenly throne of colossal dimensions.

7.2 Cosmogony in the Hebrew Bible

The cosmos God created was familiar to Ancient Semitic cosmology, sharing the world view of the firmament. The firmament is like an inverted bowl, set up in a bowl-like saucer, with the waters surrounding it. There is water above the firmament as well as Sheol (the dwelling place of the dead) below the “saucer”. On the inside of the top bowl one finds floodgates to let in rainfall. The heavenly bodies – sun, moon and stars are all “pasted” on the inside of the bowl. This was the general worldview of the people at the time.

According to the narrator, God’s eight-fold creation was done in this fashion:

Day 1: Creation of light by separating it from darkness; light was given superiority over darkness.

Day 2: Creation of the firmament and the separation of the waters above from the waters below.

Day 3: Separating land from the waters below, and whilst preparing the land, God created vegetation for the land.

*All Scripture references were taken from the HOLY BIBLE: New International Version.
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Day 4: Creating the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars, etc.) One may wonder why this wasn't done on the first day, as a supplementary task similar to that of day 3, when land was separated from water and vegetation was added. Could this be because the other cultures worshipped the sun, moon and stars as deities, and that the narrator deliberately relegated the 'value' of these lights to a secondary task by their own Yahweh?

Day 5: Creation of water animals and of birds.

Day 6: Creation of land animals and finally, the creation of human beings.

It should be noted that on days three and six the process interestingly involved two creations. On day three the waters were separated from the land and vegetation covered the earth, whilst on day six land animals were created and then man was also created in God's own image.

Day 7: The Sabbath. Here is in fact another creative creation of God. God creates Time. Time to rest and time to praise...The seventh day can be said to prove that all has been done: it is functioning, it is able, and creation is at peace.

When parallels to Genesis 1 became known to theologians, almost everyone regarded these as a threat to the biblical story of creation. According to Westermann (1984:19-20) the theologians sought to articulate the inimitable character and the religious superiority of the biblical rendition. This reticent way of thinking is still expressed in modern times by many evangelical, Jewish and Catholic interpreters. Westermann challenges this attitude by asking whether the agreement between the biblical and extra-biblical accounts can contribute to a better understanding to biblical texts (Westermann 1984:20). He continues:

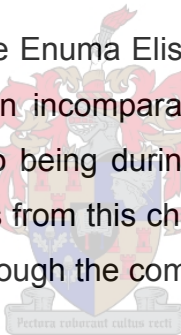
Before making any judgment on the content of the stories, it must be pointed out that what the Bible says about the creator

and the creation in Genesis 1-3...is related to what is said about the creator and the creation not only in the neighbouring religions, but in most religions of the world anywhere and at any time. Only then can we discuss the question of the difference between the biblical and non-biblical accounts.

(Westermann 1984:20)

Genesis 1 says that God alone is, and he creates out of nothing, from emptiness. In Genesis 1 we clearly note that creation forms the central theme of the narrative; whilst compared to the Enuma Elish, the main theme is the great battle for supremacy with the theme of creation taking a somewhat incidental place.

The Babylonian myth of the Enuma Elish provides a marked deviation from the gracious creation of an incomparable God, in that there was a time before the world came into being during which there pre-existed a watery chaos. Their creation starts from this chaos from which the gods originated, as they were conceived through the coming together of the sweet water and the primeval waters.



Von Rad (1972:65) rejects the possibility of struggle between the cosmic primordial principle in Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 by stating that hostility towards God cannot be traced, and that chaos has no power on its own, as it cannot exist for itself alone, but that chaos exists for faith only where God's creative will is superior to it.

Von Rad addresses the issue in verses 1 and 2, by stating that unless one speaks of chaos, one cannot deliberately think of creation at all. He adds:

It is correct to say that the verb *bārā'*, 'create', contains the idea both of complete effortlessness and *creatio ex nihilo* since it is never connected with any statement of material. The hidden

grandeur of this statement is that God is the Lord of the World, but not only in the sense that he subjected a pre-existing chaos to his ordering will! It is amazing to see how little Israel demarcated herself from an apparently overpowering environment of cosmological and theogonic myths.

(Von Rad 1972:48)

How could it have happened that myths foreign to Israel found their way into the creation narrative of Genesis?

Pettazzoni (1954:24-28) provides a valuable insight into the change in the interpretation and appreciation of the creation myth in Genesis 1. He states it in this manner: "...the proper worth of myth consists in the necessary and sufficient justification which it gives to whatever is most essential to human life and to society, by relating it to a primordial act of foundation recorded by the myth." On the creation of humankind he argues that: "...the existence of humanity depends in some sort on the myth which tells of the appearance of the first person on earth, for the recital of that myth has the power to establish and ensure continuity of human life".

He concludes by referring to the myth of the creation of the world: "...the recital of the myth of the origin of the world makes real and guarantees the stability and duration of the universe". Pettazzoni believes that the here and now is important to what is said about the creation:

...whether the world was created by the will of God, or formed, by gradual accretions, from a seed or a speck of mud brought from the bottom of the sea, or by the cosmic growth of the different bodily parts of a gigantic primeval being, is all no more than secondary importance in principle. What is of the greatest importance is that there should be a myth of beginnings, which may or may not be a myth of creation, but which cannot possibly

be done without, for on this myth, be it what it may, the very existence of the universe and of humanity depend in any case.

(Pettazzoni 1954:28)

Westermann (1984:22-24) mentions two basic types of creation, namely Creation of the Whole (the world and humankind), and Creation of the One. The creation of the whole is prevalent in Genesis 1, whilst creation of the one occurs mostly in Ancient Near East epics. Individual myths lie behind the Enuma Elish as well as Sumerian mythology where the creation of the world and the creation of humanity are told separately. In the Sumerian myths it is noted that the creation of humans takes place before the creation of the world. According to Westermann (1984:24) this also holds true for the Enuma Elish, and that only in a later stage are the creation of the world and the creation of humankind drawn closer to constitute the creation of the whole.

In contrast are the Egyptian cosmogonies where creation is virtually exclusively focused on the creation of the world, and rarely is there a reference to the creation of human beings. "The most remarkable omission from this cosmogonic pattern is the creation of mankind...", and Brandon (1963:56) further believes that the reason for this situation lies in the priestly circles that find no interest in the creation of humanity, but rather more so in the creation of the kings, which are godly representatives.

It is interesting that Westermann (1984:25) mentions that all of Israel's neighbours spoke of a personal creator-god when reciting the creation of the world and people. There was a personal relationship with the creator-god thousands of years before the beginning of Israel's history, and it is no innovation when Israel upheld God as the creator who created all and who is to be worshipped. The major difference lies in the fact that Israel's God was not created himself and that he therefore stands outside the creation. To be created is not to be god.

God creates in absolute quietude, without the presence of violence or conflict as found in other creation myths. Most creation stories revert to bloody violence between the gods. This may allude to the fact that God is indeed the only God, and that in the creation epics and myths there generally existed a number of gods vying for supremacy.

The thematic content of the story of creation is about power and control without conflict. God has the power to speak and creation follows: it actually flows from his lips as words are spoken. It portrays God as being in absolute control, not even contemplating that anything could possibly go wrong. God is a God of order – from chaos He creates more than order, he creates beauty. God is familiar with beauty when He says: “This is good”.

There is a profound composure in Gen. 1 that is missing in the Babylonian rendition of creation, as well as in the other creation myths. Gen. 1 consists of a schematic presentation in which the acts of creation are condensed into six days, with eight creative acts completed simply by the words God uttered: “And God said...”, asserting the fact that God made everything that constitutes this universe in which we live. Comparing this serenity of creation beginnings with some of the other creation epics and myths, one finds interesting parallels. Gunkel in (Westermann 1984:104) states that the belief that the world came into being out of darkness is also found in the Babylonian, Egyptian, Phoenician and the Greek renditions of creation. This indicates that human beings generally contrasted light with darkness. The same incidence may be noted in the correlation of the primeval waters and darkness, as described in verse 2.

The Egyptian, Phoenician and even the Sumerian cosmologies all seem to present the same situation before creation. The god Ptah exercised authority and, by thought, commanded through the utterance of words that creation take place. This can be related to the cosmogony of Genesis 1 where God speaks and it is as if there is a link with the New Testament: “In

the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” (John 1:1).

7.3 Genesis 1 and its Position within Genesis 1 -11

Genesis 1-11 of the Old Testament can be described as a theological account of the history of the world. The two creation renditions as in Gen. 1-2:4a and Gen. 2:4b-24 are different from each other, where each is complete in itself, but each with its own integrity (Brueggemann 2003:30). The two creation narratives concur that God created the universe and that God blesses his creation in abundance. Brueggemann continues by stating that these two creation renditions from the Priestly and the Yahwist traditions are remarkably interwoven into literary coherence in the flood narrative of Gen. 6:5-9:17, where God judges his creation and destroys all the human beings with the exception of Noah and his family. Human beings are created as the pinnacle of his creation, but disobedience leads to their fall (Brueggemann 2003:32).

This is followed by the genealogies in Genesis 10-11. “These chapters thus make a fundamental theological affirmation, but they also prepare the way for what is to come”. Brueggemann (2003:33) continues that God thwarts disobedience in his creation in order to bring human beings to obedience so that the world can be a liveable place.

Gen. 1 arguably originated not from Moses, but from the Priestly Circles in the Babylonian exile, whilst Gen 2:4b onwards is a narrative epic dating from around the time of David, revealing Israel's beliefs at the time as well as the genealogical link from Adam to Abraham to David, as the hand-reared and chosen people of God.

One should note that Gen. 1 and 2 are two different literary texts, produced by different narrators, each telling its own story to listeners in different environments. The source of Genesis 1 to Genesis 2:4b was probably from the Priestly Code (hereafter referred to as P). From Gen. 2:4b onwards the

Yawistic source (referred to as J) may have been consulted (Knight 1985:732-733).

The story of creation has been considered a classic example of the work of P by scholars since the 19th century, and has generally been dated after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 587 BCE. The setting in the Babylonian exile is seen as important for the message of P (Gowan 1988:15).

The milieu of the audience of each time necessitated a different theology as well. In the Babylonian exile, the people were removed from the core of their faith – Jerusalem and the Temple and they had to be reminded of their great God, Yahweh, who is so powerful (in comparison with the Babylonian and other Syro-Palestinian and Egyptian gods) that He created the universe and ordered it to His hand. Writing Gen. 1 in exile, detached from Jerusalem, the Temple, the priests, the king, where everything has been lost, the author tries to rejuvenate the hope of the chosen people. The message tells that the entire universe belongs to God, that it is good, and that He is in charge because He created it all (Gowan 1988:16).

There is a marked difference in the order of creation between the two creation accounts in Genesis. In Genesis 1 – 2:4a the trees and plants are created on day 3, the birds and fish on day 5, animals on day 6 and man and woman created together on day 6. However, in Genesis 2:4b onwards man is created first, possibly on day 3, trees only on day 5, animals and birds and woman as a last thought on day 6 as well. The equilibrium of creation has been disturbed, with a rushed job of creation on the final day, with birds, animals and women being created then.

The creation narratives of Genesis 1 to 2:4a comprise a distinct study unit, as mentioned earlier.

Before one becomes concerned with the incongruent phases of creation, it should be noted that these two renditions of creation not only display

different literary styles, but that they were written centuries apart. Genesis 1 is deemed to have been written during the Babylonian exile, whilst Genesis 2 was written around the time of David.

Von Rad (1972:13) tries to obscure the question in verses 1 and 2 by categorically stating that Genesis is not an independent book that can be interpreted by itself. He believes that the Hexateuch (Genesis to Joshua) in its present form constitutes an immensely connected narrative. He again refers to this when he says "...we emphasize once more that the biblical primeval history, especially the testimony regarding creation, is not an *independent* (my italics) unit within the context of the Hexateuch. The position of the story of creation at the beginning of our Bible has often lead to misunderstanding, as though the 'doctrine' of creation were a central subject of Old Testament faith." (Von Rad 1972:45).

Westermann (1984:2) differs from Von Rad in that he believes that Genesis 1-11 should be regarded as a separate element of the Pentateuch and as a self-contained unity, and not essentially as a part of Genesis as a whole. The literary types and forms of Genesis 12 – 50 cannot be imposed on Genesis 1-11. He states: "We must recognize this story as a distinct unity, as a separate element of the Pentateuch, and take it as our starting point."

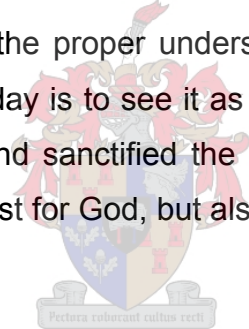
Westermann (1984:6) finds it a major deficiency that the exegesis of Genesis 1-11 has been comparing extra-biblical texts piece by piece with Genesis. Individual biblical texts are taken and compared with parallels outside their context, and this bit-by-bit comparison leads to inaccuracy and misinterpretation. My viewpoint on this is that one may indeed study the extra-biblical texts of the time before the writings of Genesis 1 and draw comparisons and to ask questions on the creation of the biblical texts, and to search for some answers.

Westermann continues to state that comparisons are mostly irregular, in that one scholar may favour the Mesopotamian text, whilst another may

prefer the Egyptian or Ugaritic texts. He further asks whether biblical texts are dependent on extra-biblical texts, and then suggests that it is necessary to study the total prehistory of the biblical story, and only then examine it against the context of its background (Westermann 1984:6).

The creation of the Sabbath adds a new dimension to the narrative and had a profound influence on the Hebrew nation from the beginning up to today. By now moving the logical concluding sentence to begin a new story, the narrator can now add his own finishing lines; those concerning the Sabbath.

The sentence in Gen. 2:1 refers back to the beginning of Gen 1:1: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...”. It declares that a full circle has been completed, and now sets the mood for the religious day of the ancient Israelites – God rested on the Sabbath. Westermann (1984: 170-171) mentions that the proper understanding of the sanctification and blessing of the seventh day is to see it as the conclusion of the whole. And because God blessed and sanctified the Sabbath, the narrator declares it not only to be a day of rest for God, but also a day of rest and atonement for the rest of the world.



Finally, the narrator closes his story on creation with the words in v. 4a: “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created”. He knew he could have stopped with verse 1 of Genesis 2, making that the last verse of Genesis 1, but he had to include the current knowledge of the Sabbath day where, according to Moses’ tablets, not one creature on earth should be active. And now, after the Sabbath was brought into clear perspective, the author finally closes with verse 4a, an unnecessary repetition of Gen. 2:1.

The author of Genesis 1 inherently knows that his rendition of the creation process was not the only version, but one of a choir as stated by Westermann (1984:173) and that he stands in a line with others, Israelites and non-Israelites, who have also described creation. It seems that the

author of Genesis 1 is aware that his task is that of a receiver and a contributor to the creation story. He indeed realises that his rendition cannot be seen as the ultimate, but he rests in the knowledge that, from an Israelite theological viewpoint, he can hardly be faulted.

7.4 The Structure and Literary Style of Genesis 1-2:4a

Let us begin by looking at the structure of Gen. 1. There are 10 declarations uttered by God in 7 days of creation, reaching the climax when human beings are created as God's caretakers of earth. This could be seen as the first pinnacle of God's creation. A second pinnacle is reached when God created the Sabbath, a day of rest for the Creator himself. Genesis 1 shows us a somewhat distant God in the creative acts up to the creation of people. When creating people, God became a little more personal in the careful and tender way the creation of people is described. In Genesis 2 we would see God as present and personable, like when he walked, in a seemingly leisurely manner, in the Garden of Eden.

Stylistically Gen. 1 is quite interesting. The implied author of Genesis is a storyteller – a very skilled one. Genesis 1 is a story of origins, of the universe, of humanity, of civilisation and eventually of Israel and one should bear in mind that the fundamental value of Genesis, as indeed of all Scripture, is theological.

There is a variation in style and language as the initial description of creation has a very solemn and repetitious note, where God is elevated and isolated.

But...Genesis 1 leaves us with a number of questions:

Is Genesis a legend? Is Genesis a myth? Is Genesis the compilation of a story of the different gods? Is Genesis prose? Is Genesis poetry? Or is it poetic narration?

Gunkel interestingly holds that legend (sage) is not necessarily fiction but it is in nature poetry that does not care so much about the record of what really happened, but it is intended to “...delight, to elevate, to inspire, to touch...” (Gunkel as cited in Skinner 1930: xviii). This delight and inspiration can be ascribed to the first orator of the story of creation on the banks of the River Babylon, where he had to enthuse and lift up his people in his interpretation of creation by a God that is so much more than anything the oppressors can create for themselves.

St Augustine cautioned against interpreting Genesis 1 in a literal way, when he said:

If anyone wishes to interpret on a literal sense everything that is written in this book, that is, to understand it only according to the letter of the text, and in doing this he avoids blasphemy and explains everything in agreement with the Catholic faith, not only is he not to be discouraged, but he should be considered an outstanding interpreter worthy of great praise.



(St Augustine 1982:35)

The author starts the narration of the Creation in a very calm manner, with no dramatic announcement of something great to happen. It is simply stated that God was present at the beginning, and that he then created the heavens and the earth. This is an indication of the absolute control God had over the expanse. The “...earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters...”, confirms that God was present before all.

The creation style is that of absolute serenity, no trace of violence or conflict as found in many creation stories. This may allude to the fact that God is and was indeed the only God, and that there is no need for conflict whatsoever. God does not even have to revert to any action, as speaking

can hardly be called action. God speaks (no shouting to gain control), he merely says, and it is; no drama, no tension and a universe is ordered.

Interestingly, God created everything with the words “And God said...” and “Let there be...” (called the *divine fiat*) except for the creation of humanity. Here God became active and he took great care in creating people: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (v. 27). This threefold repetition of the word “created” is truly poetic and seems to stress a carefulness and tenderness in the creation of people.

People may contemplate the thought that the author of Genesis 1 attempted to present a “snap-shot” of what exactly happened at the God-given moment of creation, but this would certainly minimise the fact that Genesis 1 is not a description of creation, but indeed states that all that exists is a result of God’s creation.

One may debate all the differences and even corresponding events in the said creation stories, but I would like to conclude with only one definitive point, that God created in absolute harmony and with order. God himself was not an integral part of the creation he brought about, but merely calls the world into being by nothing else than his voice.

7.5 Towards Understanding Genesis 1-2:4a

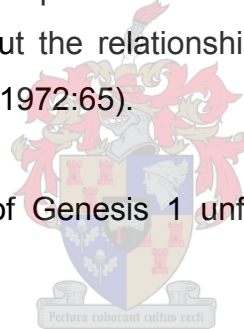
How should Genesis 1 be understood?

The Israelites were exposed to many other religions and deities in Syro-Palestine. Olivier (1991:139) puts this concisely yet comprehensively in a few words: “The strategic location of the country meant that world history was enacted virtually on its doorstep, whereas its topography ensured that only a few kilometres away from all the drama little communities could lead a tranquil, sequestered existence.” Without acknowledging the Syro-

Palestinian deities and other myths when studying Gen. 1, one would only offer a superficial analysis, as the Israelites did not live in a cultural vacuum. “Naturally, it is our decision of faith whether or not we want to take our standpoint with Israel and see her experience as a genuine encounter *with God*, rather than just an encounter with herself” (Childs 1962:103).

Von Rad states that the creation in seven days was a strange phenomenon in terms of the ancient myths, and that the events that occurred seem to have happened once in eternity and their result is unalterable. His viewpoint though, that “the seven days are unquestionably to be understood as actual days and as a unique, unrepeatable lapse of time in this world” is not generally accepted by modern theological scholars (Von Rad 1972:64–65). One has however to concur with his comment: “One cannot marvel enough at the power which made it possible for Israel to break away from this world of ideas and speak about the relationship of God to the world in quite a different way.” (Von Rad 1972:65).

The creation narrative of Genesis 1 unfolds in a way interesting to the reader.



Childs (1962:31) asks the question of how the first two verses in Gen. 1 should relate. Is the chaos conceived of as being before or after the creation? And if it did exist before the creation, did it exist autonomously from God’s creative activity? The subsequent question then needed to be put: who then created chaos? Was it pre-existent, outside the realm of God, and created by Whom? By God, in a separate creation? Obviously this discourse leads to unease and it goes against the grain of those who propagate “*creatio ex nihilo*”. If this is accepted, one has to agree that the words in Genesis 1:2 are rooted in myth. “It must be acknowledged that a *creatio ex nihilo* is never explicitly expressed in the Old Testament...” (Childs 1962:41).

The first thing that God created was light, as described in verse 3. God created brightness and through this action sets the world in motion in terms of time and order. Westermann (1984:112-113) draws an interesting comparison with Heliopolis' creation of light in the Egyptian cosmology. The creation of light follows directly after the description of chaos where a fight between the god and the dragon took place at Hermopolis. Here the primeval ocean was inhabited by four pairs of deities: The Waters, Darkness, Infinite Flood and Chaos. These were called the "Eight" from which all came into being. After the battle, the rays of the sun lighten the primeval ocean.

In v. 4 we read that God saw that the light was good before he separated the light from the darkness. Most commentators, according to Westermann (1984:112) relate this to God's preference for light, although in the creation there is a specific place for darkness. People and animals do not only rest on the seventh day of the Sabbath, but they have to rest daily, or rather nightly, to replenish their energy. Plants and especially trees, as I understand it, "work" during the day to generate the absolute essential oxygen through photosynthesis and "breathe" at night for their own survival. Therefore, night as created by the separation of light has indeed got a place in God's universal plan. The basic cadence of life begins with the sun rising and the sun setting, giving each day a rhythmic beginning and an end.

"God called the light day..." (v. 5) in a naming act. This is also evident in the Babylonian Enuma Elish. Many commentators try to explain the naming as an act of authority. One may argue that it is an act of authority and not of superiority, as human parents have the honour and authority to name a child born to them. It is not a case of superiority but rather an authoritative act done in humility. God does not boast about his naming rights, he just lovingly names things according to his choice of name.

The sentence "...there was evening, and there was morning – the first day..." (v. 5) raises the question whether the day starts in the morning or in

the evening. It is to be agreed with Westermann (1984:115) that the question is immaterial. The author is only interested in the chronology of the creation of day and night, a period of 24 hours divided into meaningful parts, and this is all that really matters.

In v. 9-10 the author's account of the separation of water and land reflects the firmament, a world picture of the time. Here he uses the words "...let there be..." and the earth is set free from the waters. One should note that God did not create the earth, he merely "...let the water under the sky gather in one place...", which is an act of separation. "And God saw that it was good..." was not mentioned after v. 8, but was only mentioned at the end of v. 10. This may serve as a perfect link between the work of the second and third days, as the world is now ordered at that stage.

When comparing the creation of water and of land with the Enuma Elish, one witnesses a violent battle between the two gods, Tiamat and Marduk. Marduk then kills Tiamat and divides her body into two halves, setting up the sky with the top half, in which the heavenly bodies and the deities associated with them then reside. The bottom half of the body is used to form the earth, completing the firmament.

In v. 11 God again speaks, and the majestic flora of the earth come into being – according to their various kinds. Plants and vegetation were not created in clusters, they were ordered into species as part of the organised entirety. As planned, plants produced seed and trees produced fruit. When God spoke here he demanded perfection and ordered coordination, and indeed he saw that it was good.

The creation of the heavenly bodies from v. 14 to v. 19 is longer than the accounts of creation of the other days. It is not a more detailed description, but rather a more repetitive account in order to determine the position of the sun and the moon in relation to each other. Why was this necessary? The sun and the moon were both divinities of paramount importance in the world

and milieu in which the people of Israel lived. The author tries to reiterate that the sun and the moon are merely ordinary functional heavenly lights to provide light for day and night. The movement of the sun helped the ordering of seasons, years and days.

This is very different from the account of creation in the Enuma Elish as per the 5th tablet mentioned in Westermann (1984:130): “God made two great lights – the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night.” (v. 16). In the Genesis account the sun and the moon, being specifically created by God, rules over a restricted area of creation only, that of day and night.

From v. 20 onwards God creates the living creatures in the water and the birds of the sky. Every living thing, great and small, in the waters is ordered into a species, as it is with the birds.

A new element in the creation narration is introduced in verse 22. God created, and God blessed it. Were God's blessings kept for the living things he created? It is clear from v. 20 that the creation story moves into another interesting stage. God loves life, and when he spoke so that beautiful living creatures in the water and in the skies and in the trees came into exuberant being, he rejoiced in his perfect creation and blessed it.

The creation of the living creatures of the land is described in verses 24 and 25. Again God merely speaks and the living creatures come into being – the livestock, creatures moving on the ground, and the wild animals, again perfectly ordered by species. “And it was so...”. And God saw that it was good. Here we note the same pattern as with the 5th day creation narrative – God waits until both creations are completed before he blesses. God creates what pleases him and then he blesses them.

The creation of man is simply and majestically announced by the words of a Divine God: “Let us make man...” This is in accordance with other myths

where a god creates a man or other god in his likeness. In ancient Egypt the Pharaoh was viewed to be "...the image of God living on earth..." (Von Rad 1972:58).

When God said "let there be..." one notices a reference to Egyptian myth, where the creation of the world derives its varied detail from the Nile valley. In Egypt's most primitive creation stories a mound rises from the waters with the creator god (in different forms, from a reptile, a bird to an insect) sitting and performing acts of fertilization.

An indisputable fact is that the creation stories have important similarities. Chaos seems to have pre-existed, and attention is given to the functional formation of the firmament, giving the heavenly bodies their function, vegetating the land and separating the waters surrounding the land. The final step in creation appears to be the creation of humankind. This will be discussed later.

The first two verses have a 'matter-of-fact' introduction that calmly sets the scene for the 'real' creation that follows. This part of the creation is for normal listeners – what is going to happen now? God was passive in the first three verses, just 'hovering' over the waters, but now God bounces into action, although it is not a physical action. God just speaks – 'and God said'.

From here one experiences the poetic rhythm of the creation's tasks, also evident in Egyptian texts. God merely utters a few words, and it simply happens, and God notices that his words have had the desired effect, and God realises that it was good, and God personally names his creation, and the action for the day ends in tranquillity when night falls. The same rhythm is repeated in all six periods of creation, with just two surprises – God blesses the birds and the living creatures in the water on the fifth day, and also blesses the human beings he created on day six. It is peculiar that God does not seem to have blessed everything, but only birds, water animals and human beings. I would support the artistic freedom of the narrator,

skilfully using the creative introduction of a different action, to keep the story fresh and developing towards the climax. The blessing of God can therefore be assumed to have been placed on every aspect of God's creation.

An interesting point to consider is that when God speaks, "...and God said...", this was directed to no one in particular. The words were spoken into the wind, and creation appears instantaneously. This is magical in our own terms of reference, but magic belongs to wizards, known to be flashy and exhibitionistic like some actions of the gods in the mythologies, for example Marduk destroying and recreating a piece of garment by magic (Westermann 1984:111). God is just completely in control and does not have to work through anything in order to create perfection.

Instead of ending Genesis 1 with the possible ending, "Thus the heavens and earth were completed in all their vast array.", these words form the opening lines of Genesis 2. Why was it done in this way? The narrator may have chosen to end the creation at the highlight of the origination of humankind; God had finished all his work, God will no longer change and intervene to de-establish the order he had created.



7.6 The Conception of Humankind in the Hebrew Bible

The apex of God's creation, a creature made in God's image, in his likeness, and a creature entrusted with the orderly keeping of the earth, is found when God creates humankind. Then God blesses again and although verse 28 begins as follows: "God blessed them and said to them...", giving the impression that God only blesses humankind because of the continuing words "...fill the earth and subdue it...", I feel that the writer could also have meant the text to have read differently. "God blessed everything he had made that has the breath of life in it and said to the humans...". In this case I must admit that this is purely my own supposition arrived at in the light of a loving and just God, a God that will not withhold his blessings on a single group of living beings, whilst blessing the rest of his creation.

One major deviation from the creation of other beings and humankind is that God created all else by means of his word: "... and God said...". Here God speaks aloud and says "let us make..." instead. Interestingly, God created humans just as male and female, and not as a variety of cultures which he then would have ordered into 'species' like he did with the fauna and flora. Was this done deliberately by the narrator, minimizing the rest of human existence, of other non-Israelite cultures? Here again I would tend to answer positively, that yes, the narrator speaks from the Rivers of Babylon, in a foreign land, knowing that his nation is deemed to be God's chosen people. Why then equate them with the rest of humankind? Yahweh is still the God of the Israelites. They are different to the other nations; they are created in God's own image.

In this light it is interesting to consider the fact that a deviation occurs from the regular 'chorus' of "God saw that it was good". This chorus occurs in four verses from verse 10, verse 12, and verse 18 to verse 25. In verse 31, after humankind was created, the refrain changes slightly in additional words, but enormously in meaning when "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Does the word 'all' now include all the creation that was already rated good, and does it elevate their status? Or can the "all" be ignored and the 'very good' account for humankind only? In this case I must admit that either of the two situations could be correct, and that it would merely be an intuitive selection should my personal preference be that the narrator favoured only humankind as very good; they are after all the creation appointed to rule over everything on earth.

In other creation myths the creation of human beings is somewhat different, as discussed under previous headings. In the Enuma Elish, Marduk kills one of Tiamat's conspirators, Qingu, and through a mixture of blood and clay and the spilled blood, humans are created. The hero Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic, was created by Aruru by means of a pinch of clay that she took on the steppe (Westermann 1984:37). King Merikare's father made people in his image, created from his body. The sun-god Re, from the

Egyptian Heliopolis cosmogony, created humans by crying and his tears (*rimi*) fell to earth and became people (*rome*). Khnum, Elephantine potter god, created people from clay on his potter's wheel, and breathed his own breath into them in order to give them life. There are more interesting creation stories of humankind in other myths, but suffice it to state that the God of creation in Genesis 1 held no copyright over human creation. From an Israelite and now from a Christian perspective God obviously had the only right to create not only humankind, but the entire creation.

God gave special emphasis to the creation of humankind – "...let us make man in our image and likeness...". God created humankind in his own image. The question comes to mind: "What is the image and likeness of God?" The image of the Israelites of the Ancient near East? Or the image of dedicated Christians through the ages?

God created humankind in his image – no matter their religion, no matter their skin colour, no matter their sex and no matter their nationality. God also created humankind to have a relationship with him, as God has the immense yearning to have communion with people. To debate the image of God is fruitless and the debate should rather focus on the relationship with Him. We are called by God, through creation to his image, into Covenant Partnership. And to conclude the discussion on this issue one should humbly bow, using the words of St. Augustine (reference not available): "Without God we cannot. Without us God will not".

Chapter Eight

The Creation Narrative in Genesis 1–2:4a and Modern Science

8.1 The “Big Bang” Theory

It seems today that the creation narrative of Genesis 1 stands in direct contrast with modern science. Science seems to be the only empirical (and reliable) way with which to associate truth. In 1927 Georges Lemaître speculated that the universe originated from a primeval atom. This theory was later developed by George Gamow. In 1929 Edward Hubble formulated Hubble’s Law, proposing that the universe had a definite origin, thereby existing for a set time, but in an expanding universe. Due to the numerous inputs of contributing scientists, an apparent reconstruction of the history of the universe can be made. Recent calculations of Hubble’s expansion have estimated the age of the universe to be between 12 billion and 15 billion years. The Big Bang Theory was named as such in 1950 by the astrophysicist Fred Hoyle, referring to Lemaître and Gamow’s theory as the big bang idea. One may well think of the Big Bang as a massive eruption from virtually nothing, but in fact it was not a blast, rather an explosion and subsequent expansion of space itself.

Barbour (1990:126–128) leads one through the Big Bang chronology in time. We can construe that time=0, at the beginning of time and of the universe, which is referred to as ‘infinite singularity’ by scientists.

The earliest knowledge of events can be measured only from $t=10^{-43}$ seconds. Determining what happened before that time is mere speculation, and the area of much debate between scientists and theologians, as well as Bible believers.

The entire universe was the size of an atom as we know it today – infinitely small, but it still possessed the inconceivable density of 10^{96} that of water. One must not confuse this with the size of an atom as if it existed in infinite

empty space, but as empty space that also existed equal to the size of the original atom.

At only 10^{-43} seconds after the starting of time and 'creative act', the moment that the 'primeval atom' with its size of 10^{-50} mm, separated under immense gravitational forces, the temperature was 10^{32} degrees Celsius. During this immense heat of billions of degrees Celsius, the cosmos grew to the size of an orange.

At 10^{-35} seconds the temperature was so high, at 10^{28} degrees Celsius, that three of the four basic physical forces became equal in strength, that is: the electromagnetic force responsible for light and the intrinsic protocol of charged particles; the weak nuclear force controlling radioactivity; and the strong nuclear force that binds protons and neutrons into nuclei.

The fourth physical force – the gravitational force apparent in the attraction of masses was weak at this moment, allowing the strong nuclear force to separate and begin the expanding process.

At 10^{-10} seconds the electromagnetic, as well as the weak nuclear forces, separated to form a mass of hot quarks with the temperature cooling down to 10^{15} degrees.

At 10^{-4} seconds (a ten-thousandth of a second): The quarks produced protons and neutrons, whilst the temperature cooled down further to 10^{12} degrees (one thousand billion degrees Celsius).

Three minutes after the beginning of time, the temperature decreased to 10^9 degrees, and hydrogen and helium nuclei were formed from the protons and neutrons.

Five hundred thousand years later the temperature decreased to just 2 000 degrees Celsius, in which time atoms were formed.

A billion years later galaxies were formed.

Ten billion years later the formation of planets took place.

Twelve billion years after the beginning of time microscopic life started to form on the planet earth.

Today, an estimated 15 billion years after the Big Bang we reflect on the Big Bang moment.

To the lay person and non-scientist all these timings and formulations seem arbitrary. But recent cosmological theories have it that even a very small change in timing or temperature would certainly have resulted in an absolutely different and uninhabitable universe (Barbour 1990:135). Hawking states: "If the rate of expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in a hundred thousand million million it would have recollapsed before it reached its present size..." (Hawking 1988:121). Had the rate of expansion, however, been greater only by one part in a million, the expansion of the universe would have been too hurried for stars and planets to form. Should the strong nuclear force not have been equal to the other two forces mentioned above, only hydrogen would have existed in the universe, with no possibility of the formation of water.

If one looks further to the particle and antiparticle ratio, one encounters further astounding facts. In the early universe, there existed one billion and one protons for every one billion antiprotons (Barbour 1990:136). In order to produce radiation, the billion pairs of protons and antiprotons obliterated each other, and only one proton was left over. If the protons and antiprotons had been evenly matched, and no proton remained, our material world would have been impossible. The laws of physics seem to favour symmetry between particles. One may rightfully ask the question – why this minute asymmetry, one extra proton in one billion? The answer is not logical, but it

made the absolute difference that counts in order for our universe to be as it is today.

Hawking recognises evidence of design in the moment of time. “The odds against a universe like ours emerging out of something like the Big Bang is enormous. I think there are clearly religious implications...” as quoted by Boslough (1984:121).

“Although science may solve the problem of how the universe began, it cannot answer the question: why does the universe bother to exist? I don’t know the answer to that” (Hawking 1993:90).

Hawking referred to the general reviews of his book, *A Brief History in Time*, which states that once we find a complete unified theory, we shall really know the mind of God, in this way - “In the proof stage I nearly cut the last sentence of the book, which was that we would know the mind of God. Had I done so, the sales might have been halved...” (Hawking 1993:33). My deduction is that Hawking did imply that he doubted the formation of a complete unified theory, ever.



Hawking (1988:136) continues “...we have the same problem in the classical theory of specifying the initial state of the universe: God may know how the universe began, but we cannot give any particular reason for thinking it began one way rather than another.”

He also added, “So long as the universe had a beginning, we could suppose it had a creator. But if the universe is completely self-contained, having no boundary or edge, it would have neither beginning nor end: it would simply be. What place, then, for a creator?” (Hawking 1988:140).

He attracted the wrath of followers of religion with his conclusion:

However, if we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason – for then we would know the mind of God.

(Hawking 1988:175)

The debate between scientists and religious people continues, and few envisage a lasting reconciliation between them.

8.2 Creationism

Biblical religions believe that God created the universe with all that surrounds it by using the spoken word, yet there are many people who believe in the divine act of creation who do not emphatically reject or object to scientific viewpoints regarding creation. According to Harrold et al. (2004:67), “Creationism – religiously-based anti-evolution – is not a unitary phenomenon.” They concur:

Despite their many theological differences, creationists tend to share a doctrinal emphasis on the Bible as the repository of divine revelation, and a consequent disposition to interpret scriptural accounts as literal truth whenever possible. They are uncomfortable with metaphorical interpretations of historical accounts of the Bible. The genesis of the creationist movement lies in the collision of this theology with modernist, naturalistic science as it manifests itself in evolutionary biology.

(Harrold et al. 2004:67)

Creationism covers a broad spectrum of beliefs, all in order to reconcile the biblical creation account with the empirical findings of modern science. Let us briefly distinguish between the various interpretations of creationism.

8.2.1 Flat-Earthers

A relatively small group of people live with the basic belief that the earth is flat. The concept of the firmament, as per the creation understanding of the author of Genesis 1, is held firmly.

8.2.2 Young Earth Creationists

The belief is held that God created the universe about 6 000 years ago, in 6 days of 24 hours each. They have a strict literal belief in Genesis 1. The age of the earth varies from 4004 BCE to 10 000 and even 20 000 years. All kinds of life were created *ex nihilo* by God in the exact ordering of God in Genesis. Some creationists may accept limited evolution such as that from wolves to domestic dogs. This creationism is the dominant form of creationism, and many people are therefore ignorant of the fact that such creationism is but one of many viewpoints (Eve & Harrold 1990:46).

8.2.2.1 Modern Geocentrism: The focal point is that God created the universe as stated above, but that the earth is placed in the centre of the universe, where everything in the universe revolves around the earth. This stands in direct contrast with the general modern view that the universe does not have a centre.

8.2.2.2 The Omphalos Hypothesis: The word 'omphalos' is the Greek word for 'naval'. This belief is held by a relatively small group of people ascribing to the young earth creationist beliefs. The question whether Adam had a navel, whilst being created adult, leads to this hypothesis first proposed in 1857 by Henry Gosse. Therefore, although Adam had no navel as he was not created by means of an umbilical cord, God gave him a navel, as he needed it to look 'right'. The thought process is that God created the earth only recently but that God gave it an older and authentic appearance.

8.2.3 Old Earth Creationists

The second major creationist viewpoint is that of the old earth creationists. The belief is that God created the universe, but that the creation events in Genesis should not be taken literally. Here cognisance of the scientific age of the universe is taken as presented by scientists. They resolve the age of the earth in various ways.

8.2.3.1 Gap Creationism: Also referred to as 'restitution creationism', this posits that an undefined amount of time passed between verses 1 and 2 of Genesis 1. Verse 1 describes God creating an ordered universe, whilst verse 2 starts with an already existing but chaotic universe. God here only promotes order and gives it form. To the gap creation thinkers this means that one or even more cycles of creation and destruction could have taken place in a time span of millions or even billions of years. This "pre-Adamic" era had perished and it is left out of the creation narrative in Genesis, because the Bible is only concerned with God's relationship with humankind. Therefore there is no need for knowledge about possible earlier creations that do not concern us (Eve & Harrold 1990:47).

8.2.3.2 Day-age Creationism: The outlook here is that the six days in Genesis are not really twenty-four-hour periods, but that they could be millions of years. These theorists believe that the Hebrew word *yôm*, translated as 'day' could also mean 'age' as in geological ages. They tend to stand closer to a metaphorical interpretation than do gap theorists. But they reject evolution just as vehemently as the gap theorists, particularly in human creation.

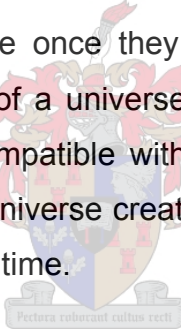
8.2.3.3 Progressive Creationism: This view accepts most of modern scientific beliefs of the age of the universe and the earth. They agree that the order in God's creation differs from the order evident in geological as well as fossil verification. They also acknowledge that Genesis contains inconsistencies in that plants were created before the sun, and could not have survived in such conditions. They believe that creation did not happen all at once and that during the passing of time, God created new species, ultimately

leading to the creation of humankind by God. God instigates evolutionary changes.

8.2.4 Theistic Evolution

The view is that faith and science are not really in opposition, but that Biblical teachings are truly compatible with some or most modern scientific theories. It is often referred to as 'evolutionary creationism'. The relevant question is: "How can this evolving world as disclosed by science bear a theological interpretation?" and it is answered as follows:

The model that emerges as we make sense of it, is a dynamic model, a model where we see a universe in constant process of change and development in ways which are not predetermined and yet which are discovered to be intelligible once they have happened. As I see it, such a model of a universe in process of change is very much more compatible with the notion of the Living God than that of a universe created whole, perfect and entire at one moment in time.



(Habgood 1982:4-5)

To the creation scientists, theistic evolution is totally unacceptable, and they deem theistic evolution as a theological compromise which appeases the theists whilst sustaining the false doctrine of naturalistic evolution.

8.2.5 Neo-Creationism

According to Harrold et al. (2004:76), neo-creationism coalesced as a distinctive movement only in the 1990's, and it is rooted in old-earth ideas. The followers of this thought dissociate themselves from other forms of creationism. They look at science as an atheistic 'religion', which is the cause of the sins of today's society.

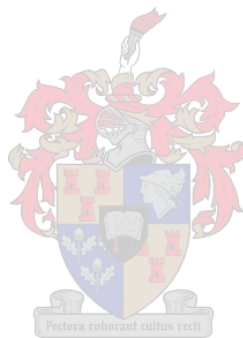
The most renowned form of this movement is the intelligent design concept, arguing that most of the questions regarding the universe and its inhabitants may be ascribed to an intelligent cause only. The concept is that only an intelligent cause could have contributed to certain characteristics of living beings as well as of the universe. If stated as a scientific theory, this puts it in direct confrontation with scientists who believe that there is no empirical evidence that life has been designed by an intelligent agent. The reply of the intelligent design school to this criticism is that although it may be impossible to empirically observe the nature of an intelligent agent, it is possible to identify such effects in living beings and in nature.

8.3 Evolution

Darwin's *The Origin of Species* was first published in November 1859, and caused a stir in both the religious and secular worlds. One may note that many of his fiercest critics may have never read the book. But that is part of human life. Ratzsch (1996:31) summarises Darwin's theory as follows:

- (i) living organisms naturally produce more progeny than the environment can support, resulting in
- (ii) competition among organisms of the same species for limited resources such as food, water, breeding partners, etc. On further observation it is noted that
- (iii) descendants exhibit inheritable variations from both parents and from one another. In some cases such variations are exclusively new and innovative; resulting in any variation in that specific environment constituting an advantage that will gradually spread throughout the breeding population. The individuals owning the advantage will leave more offspring than those who do not possess it. Over time and many generations those who do not have the competitive edge will be marginalised to extinction. The repetitive order will eventually form new species. All this normally takes place in the absence of angry [violent?] conflict and occurs in a timeous and slow process.

As noted above, Darwin's work caused a cataclysm in religious circles, especially among those who held a literal view of the Genesis creation narratives – it contained a theory that challenged the core of their belief.



Chapter Nine

Conclusion

The mythology of the Ancient Near East exhibits remarkable elements of fantasy and imagination and an overwhelming richness in both differences and similarities.

I have endeavoured to gain insight into the role of myth within cultural systems. In addition to this, I have investigated the different types of myths and their character, while I have also examined different interpretations of myths. In the end I concur with Eliade (1960:16) that when myths are no longer believed to be a revelation of the mysteries they hold, they become unreliable and unobserved and reduced to mere tales or legends. The myths that have been studied are alive and vibrant, and deserve the interest and respect of all who are serious about their origins.

The nature of cosmogonic myths is such that it is evident in all cultures, and that it gives us renditions of the primordial times – at the beginning, with various rituals to commemorate the creation events. One is exposed to a variety of cosmic myths: creation from chaos (or peace), creation by birth, creation from a cosmic egg or a primeval mount or hill, *creatio ex nihilo*, and creation through the power of the word.

Egypt, with its various cosmogonies, has contributed richly to the variance in creation. At Heliopolis one witnessed creation through birth by the god Atum. One identified creation by the word in Memphis, uttered by the god Ptah, and in Hermopolis one observed creation by means of a cosmic egg.

Mesopotamian cosmogony, on the other hand, is not as illustrious as Egyptian cosmogony. In both regions one cannot distinguish between cosmogony and theogony, since the gods are paramount in the permanence and control of the cosmos. In Mesopotamia one gains insight into the organisation of the cosmos, rather than the establishment thereof. Here one may briefly look at the organisation of the cosmos in the Sumerian literature of Enki and Sumer where,

“... Enki decrees the fate of Sumer, fills the Tigrus and the Euphrates with water and fish...”.

The cosmogonies of Egypt and Mesopotamia both reveal creation by separation, and through violent struggle. The creation of human beings takes a secondary place after the creation of the gods, and in both renditions humans are created to serve the gods. In Egypt however, the Kings or Pharaohs were to be served.

In the Syro-Palestinian cosmogony one is exposed to virtually the opposite of that found in the cosmogonies of Egypt and Mesopotamia. God creates in a “Godly” manner (*bārā'*). Creation is not an act of birth, but *creatio ex nihilo* by a monotheistic ever-existing God. God creates and does not merely give order to pre-created creations.

In Genesis 1 there is no creation by means of struggle – God merely speaks and it is. One does, however, see some examples of struggle with primeval monsters in the Old Testament, like Rahab in Isaiah 51. Psalm 89 further tells how Yahweh cut up Rahab’s carcass, whilst Psalm 74:13-14 refers to Yahweh’s dividing the sea with his might and crushing the head of Leviathan. Job 3:8 also refers to Leviathan. Job 26:12 recollects Yahweh’s stilling the sea by his power and adds that by his understanding alone he struck down Rahab. Genesis 1 however contains no struggle or violence. Yet, one notes here the similarity to the creation by the word as per the god Ptah in Memphis.

The creation elements such as the sun, moon, and stars are not gods, but mere planets. Furthermore, the creation in six days is unique to Genesis 1 and the creation of human beings receives a more dignified and more prominent place than in any other Ancient Near East cosmogony.

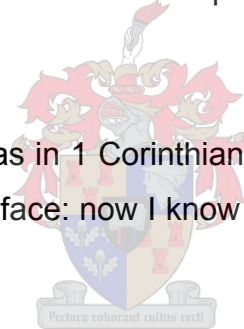
If one believes in the perfect *creatio ex nihilo* of God in Genesis 1, does one have no choice then but to reject *creatio continua*?

The creationist movements all hold different opinions, but all reject metaphorical interpretations of Genesis 1. As Harrold (2004:67) reiterates, "...the genesis of the creationist movement lies in the collision of this theology with modernist, naturalistic science as it manifests itself in evolutionary biology."

But what then about the "Big Bang" theory?

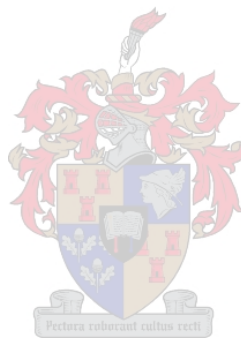
Does it solve the quest for knowledge by modern society? I conclude by quoting Hawking (1988:175) in the very words that ignited enormous and continuing debate, "...if we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason – for then we would know the mind of God."

Do we note the same promise as in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known"?



Compared to Ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies, the myths of Gen. 1 and Gen. 2-3 have been given a distinctly Israelite essence. This is one of the most original examples of the flavouring of ideas or concepts to appease the human mind. In modern day we have come to understand two principles in order to 'sell' a concept or an object. The first principle is the 'selling principle', known in the marketing world today to mean 'sell what you have'. This simply implies the creation of an idea, concept or an object (product) and going out to sell it – very much in the same vein as Henry Ford statement that you may have any car you desire, as long as it is a black Model-T Ford. Opposing this is the 'marketing principle' suggesting that you should 'have what you can sell'. The Israelite 'difference' was to give the world something it does not possess, but certainly yearns for – a monotheistic god – a god that does not come from chaos, and is above chaos.

The uniqueness of the God of Israel stands above that of the alleged gods of other nations. Although we are still situated within the domain of a myth, this myth is superseded by the truth of the Israelite faith.



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